

Nimuendajá: The Eastern Timbira

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Notwithstanding Ribeiro's explicit assertion that the Krahô' of 1816 did not know how to raise or treat cotton, it seems to me to have been native to all Northwestern and Central Gê before the advent of civilization. In the first place, cotton is employed in a variety of ways—in wholly aboriginal forms of industry as well as in ceremonial, notably in the boys' initiation festival. A second argument is the technique of plaiting cotton carrying slings for children, though it must be admitted that according to Ribeiro¹⁰ their material was buriyá bast. Third, there is the form of the spindle, deviating from the neighboring Neobrazilian and Guajajara parallels (pl. 18, a); finally, all the Northwestern tribes share the same word for cotton.

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Ethnographically, however, the kupá is the most important of Timbira cultivated species. This creeper (*Cissus* sp.) has starchy tendrils, which attain the thickness of an inch and are baked in earth ovens. It does not occur wild; is restricted, so far as my information goes, to the Eastern and Western Timbira and the Serénte, all of them Gê tribes; and is pronouncedly xerophil. Accordingly, it is probably a very old cultivated species peculiar to these tribes, which could not have borrowed it from either Neobrazilians or any of their present Indian neighbors.

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As for tobacco, my corresponding comment on it among the Apinayé also holds for the Eastern Timbira. Apparently they were acquainted with it before the coming of civilization, but even nowadays they do not plant it, the timid attempts of this or that Rgmkô'kamekra having invariably failed to yield satisfactory results. I did not observe a single case of its magical or ceremonial use among these people. Both sexes, however, are passionate smokers and constantly beg for tobacco. They smoke cigarettes of maize husks or tanager bast; a few also use little clay pipe bowls bent at an angle, with bamboo stems (kašim; Portuguese, caximbo). The chief Kukráčá' manufactures very pretty and neatly finished specimens, partly for sale to Neobrazilians, among whom the same form is in vogue.

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Uruçú and pepper shrubs, as well as sporadic *Crocentia*, mango, lemon or orange trees, are planted beside or behind dwellings, the young plants being guarded against roving pigs and fowls by little fences of vertically set sticks or by circumscribed quadrangles made of former racing logs.

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The true plantations (pl. 5, a) are situated in the narrow *galeria* forests by the brooks. Since annually new clearings are necessary, the distance of the plots from the village steadily increases. When the transportation of the crops becomes altogether too cumbersome, the Indians are obliged to move their village near the new plots. Thus, the Rgmkô'kamekra migrate with fair regularity about every ten years from the Ribeirão Santo Estevão to the Ribeirão dos Boia. While they are stationed by one of the two creeks for from ten to twenty years, the timber of the other grows again sufficiently to permit the creation of new plots.

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Each individual family has its plantation, owned by the woman. No single man owns a plot, but many an unmarried woman claims one and gets her kinsmen to make the requisite clearings, this being an exclusively masculine task. For the last hundred years only iron axes have been in use, different brands being very well distinguished by the natives, who rightly prefer the North American "Collins" blades. No one nowadays is able to haft such stone blades as are still occasionally found. The method of felling timber with iron tools coincides with Neobrazilian practice. Though not every Indian has a good ax suitable for the purpose, he may borrow a relative's.

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The several plots belonging to the married woman of an extended family usually, but not always, adjoin one another. At times one individual family may simul-

¹⁰ Memória, § 12.

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taneously own plots in two separate sites. Boundaries between the plantations of different owners are generally marked by rows of maize plants. The size of a plot depends on the tree-feller's industry. One hectare (not quite two and a half acres) is probably the minimum for a single family, many owning double that area, but estimates are difficult because the form is never regular. Pohl sets the diameter of a Pörekamekra extended family's farm at one hundred fathoms—a somewhat smaller estimate. The yield naturally hinges by no means exclusively on the extent of the clearing and the number of plants, but very largely on the care bestowed on them. In this respect the Eastern Timbira are often incredibly negligent. To be sure, many families violently exert themselves in felling timber and planting their crops, so that they could well harvest far more than the needs of subsistence. But after this initial effort they pay little attention, so that the farm goes to rack and ruin. There is no such personal sentimental bond between cultivated plants and their owner as I discovered among the Apinayé.²²

Both sexes jointly plant, weeding is almost wholly a feminine job, harvesting exclusively so. No man will ever haul a carrying-basket with fruits; at most he may

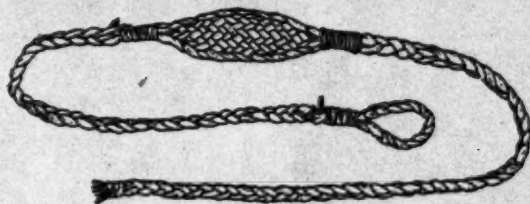


Fig. 4. Sling. $\frac{1}{2}$ nat. size.

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carry a few maize cobs or tubers in his hands. At the time of maturation swarms of dwarf parrots attack the plantations, which are mostly guarded by the bigger boys, armed with slings (fig. 4) or, more rarely, with pellet bows (pl. 15, a) borrowed from the Neobrazilians.

Except where the plots of the steppe Timbira adjoin impenetrable riparian forests they are protected by coarse, heavy fences made of logs resting on forked supports. These enclosures are to shut out not, as Snethlage supposed, game animals, but rather the cattle of neighboring ranchers, the worst plague that afflicts their fields. But notwithstanding these fences the beasts, particularly if of the zebu breed, often break down the barrier and will within a few hours destroy the whole crop. Fazendeiros have more than once deliberately driven their herds into the Indians' plantations, especially if they were "rightful owners" of Indian lands, in order to compel the natives to abandon the site. Only about ten years ago this was the fate of the Mākamekra horde of the Krahô' and their plantations at the sources of the Rio Manoel Alves Pequeno. If the Indians then shoot down one of these pests and consume it by way of indemnifying themselves for the loss of their farm, the stockmen wax highly indignant over such "cattle lifting."

241 Of the wild animals harmful to the crops the dwarf parrots rank as the worst. No sooner has the sun risen than they swarm from their nocturnal resting places in the riparian trees and swiftly pounce upon the crops, screaming aloud. Thus they cause considerable havoc, not so much by what they consume as by the quantities of scattered and spoiled fruit. This applies, above all, to the ripening maize

²² Nimuendajá, *The Apinayé*, 90.

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423 The members of a house community of the type described are obviously closer to one another than to outsiders at large, but they fail to constitute a definite economic unit among the Timbira. The plantations of the residents are ordinarily in juxtaposition, but every married woman has her own plots and the house community as such has no property apart from the domicile.

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627 However, the entire group will safeguard the individual's rights against any injustices from the outside. On one occasion, for example, a man treated his wife badly and deserted her, whereupon her extended family met for prolix deliberations and tried to force the renegade to pay an indemnity. In this sense the safety of the individual rests on his affiliation with the major family, and during disputes one often hears such threats as: "I have a large body of kindred." To tell a man to his face that he lacks kin is an affront.

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[52] On the other hand, the house community plays not the slightest role in ceremonial. Further it lacks a genuine head. Theoretically the grandmother should occupy that position, but this obtains in a small minority of cases because with increasing age her daughters grow dominant. Actually the main part devolves on some matrilineal grandfather or uncle, who may not even live in the house. A matriarchate and the enslavement of women are notions equally foreign to the Timbira.

Snethlage has correctly grasped the nature of this unit.¹⁰⁰

RAINY SEASON MOIETIES¹⁰¹

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221 During the meipimra'k period, that is, from September to April—in other words, roughly during the rainy season—there are no major festivals. It is accompanied by a distinctive dual division which coincides with neither the exogamous moieties, nor the plaza moieties, nor the age-class moieties—notwithstanding the fact that it, too, is connected with the antithesis of east and west. The two groups are called ka'makra and atu'kmakra, that is, people (kra) of the plaza (ka') and people from without (atu'k). The Indians are unable to explain these designations. The female members are termed ka'kwēye and atu'kkwēye.

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821 All of nature is antithetically divided between the two groups, as indicated by the following incomplete scheme.

	ka'makra		atu'makra
East	Fire	West	Firewood
Sun	Earth	Moon	Water
Day	Red color	Night	Black color
Dry season		Rainy season	

This dichotomy does not involve the opposition of the sexes, but extends to animals and plants: all species that are black or show marked black coloring fall into the atu'k category; all those conspicuously red or white are ka'. Maize and manioc are ka', the sweet potato and cucurbit atu'k; yams are, according to the species, divided up between the two groups. The Indians justify the allocation of the celestial bodies by referring to the sun's rising in the east and to the new moon's in the west.

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611 Affiliation with a rainy season moiety hinges on a person's names, which inevitably place him in one or the other category. The name sets are transferred by the same principle that determines allocation to a plaza group; a man transfers his

¹⁰⁰ Meine Reise, 464. Nordostbras. Ind., 170.

¹⁰¹ It may in the future prove useful in ethnological literature to call "nonexogamous" moieties "agamic" or "agamous." These terms, already in vogue among biologists, would better designate moieties that are neither exogamous nor endogamous. R. H. L.

574 among his own people. This man assigned a corner of his house as our lodging, had
648 his wife roast some gourds, and even managed to secure a bit of meat for us. During
609 the night I was unable to sleep a wink, for Kopkré harangued the Apá'nyekra seated
[537] around him literally from 7 P.M. until 4 A.M. Not at that time understanding a word
of Timbira speech, I asked him what he had told our hosts; he replied that he had
admonished them to live peaceably and morally. It is inexplicable whence he derived
the substance of his Marathón speeches, for the replies of the Apá'nyekra were far
briefer; however, at least some of them listened to the very end.

648 In 1930 the Rámkō'kamekra were struck with the disconcerting lack of arara
438 feathers required for the ketúaye initiation. Accordingly, they once more—with all
due precautions—sent an embassy to the Apá'nyekra, who were somewhat better
off in this respect, in order to get arara feathers in exchange for clay tobacco pipes
of Neobrazilian type which had been manufactured by old Kukráč'.

648 In 1933 a Krahō' delegation accompanied by one Kénkatéye visited us at Ponta.
574 The Krahō' have no honorary chief there, but being on close terms of friendship
with the Apá'nyekra they proceeded to the house of the above-mentioned woman
married to a member of this tribe. At sunset, as the councilors were assembling in
the plaza, the head chief Ropká' rose and for a while sang with outstretched arms.
Then he leaned on his staffelub, rocking his body to and fro, and with his powerful
voice shouted toward the house harboring the newcomers, "You poor fellows! I pity
you! Don't you know how malevolent our tribe is! Truly you are men of courage to
have ventured here. Now come to the plaza and tell us what you are here for! Don't
linger long! Hurry, so that we may find out!" Thereupon the three guests paid their
respects to the chiefs and sat down, saying they had come for a visit. Actually, their
object was apparently to induce me to return to the Krahō'. Then Ropká' sent them
to his dwelling to eat. These visitors were well treated and stayed over a week. What-
ever house they entered, they were entertained with food, and wantons were sup-
plied to sleep with them.

574 The reception of a Guajajára embassy has already been described on page 46 f.
609 The Eastern Timbira, as indicated by my experiences among the Apá'nyekra, are
577 not particularly hospitable to civilized visitors. It is true that no tribe will deny a
transient a night's lodging. Usually one of the chiefs, or often enough some other
resident, will allot the traveler a place in his wife's or mother's dwelling, except
possibly among the Apá'nyekra, where I noticed a dilapidated shed for strangers.
However, food is provided only for an old acquaintance who has extended hospi-
tality to the Indians; whether other strangers go hungry, is nobody's concern. If
the traveler makes an impression of wealth, he is brought some trifling "gift"—a
mere overture for unremitting mendicancy. Chiefs, however, are not supposed to
beg in the way of the Apá'nyekra chief described above. I have never heard of a
guest being robbed by his immediate hosts, but he has to be aware of inquisitive
visitors from other households. I can certainly not vouch with the same enthusiasm
as Snethlage for the honesty and trustworthiness of the Rámkō'kamekra.²²

LAW

421 Property.—Contrary to Apinayé custom,²³ among the Eastern Timbira, the land
• 423 belongs to the tribe, not to the village community. This difference probably results
619 from the far lesser stability of the Eastern Timbira communities. A few years before
my visit to the Pukōbye the aldeia of Morro do Chapéu had split into two settlements,
São Felix and Recurso, but the land remained undivided; and similar developments
occurred among the Krahō'.

²² Snethlage, *Nordostbras. Ind.*, 115; Reise, 468.

²³ Nimuendajú, *The Apinayé*, 11.

421 A particular tribe, then, owns certain rivelets and creeks with their affluents and the important correlated *galeria* forests; the next creek and its adjacent area, beyond the watershed, belongs to the neighboring tribe. Thus the ancient boundary between the Rãmkô'kamekra and the Apq'nyekra was formed by the watershed between the large Papagaio and Porcos creeks, two affluents of the Rio Corda. The entire district drained by the Flores, a rivelet tributary to the Mearim, belonged to the Çq'kamekra. Beyond the eastern watershed of the Flores lay the land of the Hakapô (=Gamella of Codó). Reduced by wars and epidemics, the Çq'kamekra retreated before the Neobrazilians into the extreme southern corner of their habitat; and when that, too, proved an untenable refuge, they united with the Rãmkô'kamekra, sharing their territory on wholly equal terms.

The northern boundary of the Apq'nyekra and Rãmkô'kamekra consisted of the wooded area of the Mearim, to which these steppe dwellers attached no importance, so that the Guajajara were able to settle there.

422 The Mearim divided the Çq'kamekra and Rãmkô'kamekra on its right bank from the Krêyê of Bacabal on the left. Originally no Timbira tribe simultaneously occupied both banks of the Tocantins; this was subsequently done by the Krahô', but only because of Neobrazilian pressure. Anyone may hunt, fish, gather, and make a clearing at will within the tribal territory. A plot, so long as it is under cultivation, belongs to the family of the woman for whom the clearing was made. Wild fruit-trees are never privately owned unless they have been deliberately spared in clearing a plot. Fellow tribesmen never quarrel over the exploitation of the tribal area. The endless land disputes among Neobrazilians, often leading to murder or manslaughter, figure as a proof of their malevolence. Snethlage reports that two prominent Rãmkô'kamekra of mature age belonging to complementary moieties had the Indian agent in Barra do Corda smooth out difficulties over a boundary transgression.²² I cannot conceive either how such a dispute could have arisen or how the moieties could have been involved, hence I must assume some misunderstanding on this investigator's part.

423 An object belongs to its maker or winner or to the person for whom it was produced or won. For example, a wife not merely owns the utensils manufactured by herself, but also the objects—say, sleeping mats—made for her by her husband; further, the plot and house cleared and erected by the husband or his assistants. Children become owners of the toys made for them by parents and relatives as soon as the objects are handed to them. Proprietary claims of this sort are generally acknowledged to the fullest extent, the solitary exception being the encroachments of a wife's brothers on her husband's private possessions (see p. 125).

424 Except for houses and cultivated plots, private property is markedly unstable. Chattels, even the most valuable of them, such as rifles, bush-knives, axes, iron pots, and arara feathers frequently pass to new owners because of the fees often obligatory on individuals as well as organizations. As shown elsewhere (p. 75), an exaggerated value is attached to tame wild pigs, hence the killing of these animals that regularly recurs during certain festivals involves indemnification of the families which reared them, thus accounting for circulation of considerable property. Another, though rare, occasion for the transfer of many goods is the ceremonial exchange of precentresses when peace is concluded. At the close of the pepyé the families of the new initiates give presents to the two girl associates; in 1933 the elders expressed displeasure with the meagerness of the offerings, whereupon the first commandant of the pepyé stepped up, unbuckled his unused bush-

²² Snethlage, *Nordostbras. Ind.*, 168.